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18 April 1987**SPJ, SDX First Amendment counsel says:****Webster will not lessen media/government tension as CIA chief**

By M.L. Stein

The notion that FBI director William Webster, by taking over as CIA chief, will lessen tension between the government and the news media over national security "may be wishful thinking at best and dangerous self-delusion at worst," a Washington media lawyer recently told northern California journalists.

Bruce Sanford, First Amendment counsel to the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, termed Webster, who has been nominated by President Reagan to succeed the ailing William Casey as CIA director, an "honorable and talented public servant" but questioned his commitment to openness in government.

In a San Francisco speech opening a two-day workshop on freedom of information, Sanford declared: "The myth is that Webster will make everything all right within a national security establishment that is scornful of Congressional oversight and contemptuous of the American people. . . . The reality is that Webster has presided over an FBI that worships secrecy."

According to Sanford, Webster, for the past nine years, has run an FBI counterintelligence operation "that charitably might be called incompetent. The reality is that while the bureau was bungling its job of catching spies operating in the U.S., the administration was deflecting criticism by attacking the press for publishing alleged national secrets."

The speaker accused the FBI of running a "Keystone Cops" operation in attempting to catch alleged spy Edward Lee Howard while Casey, with Webster's acquiescence, blamed the *Washington Post* for its coverage of spy trials and threatened Jim Polk and NBC News for its reporting of bungling by U.S. intelligence operatives.

"It's time for Judge Webster to say loudly and forthrightly that the American press does not jeopardize national security," Sanford said.

"Americans who have access to national secrets and sell them to the Soviets do jeopardize national secu-



Bruce Sanford

ity. It's time for the press and public to insist that our CIA director stop wasting his afternoons threatening the news media with criminal prosecutions, and address the tough, huge problem of developing a more effective counterintelligence operation in the country.

"And it is time for the press to refrain from the defensiveness that marked our response to Casey's threats last year and refrain from believing the myths that we create so well."

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Sanford's speech was part of a workshop, "Keeping the Public's Business Public," jointly sponsored by the University of California, Berkeley, Graduate School of Journalism and the northern California chapter of SPJ, SDX.

Ben Bagdikian, dean of the graduate school, addressed the same theme, asking, "Where were the jour-

nalists during the time the government was negotiating arms shipments to Iran and transfer of funds to Nicaraguan rebels?

"Why did the American people have to depend on an obscure magazine in Beirut to discover that there was this coming and going of well-known Americans bearing Bibles and cakes?" Bagdikian questioned.

"There were tons of armaments being delivered by ship and air. Millions of dollars were being handled by people of at least seven different nationalities. Where were all our demon investigative reporters?"

The media critic, a former Washington Post assistant managing editor and ombudsman, suggested one reason for lack of coverage might be that the media hesitated to expose the Iran scandal because it feared an accusation of being unpatriotic.

"I think we would be confronted with, 'There they go again,' or 'The damn news media are trying to destroy another president,' or 'Reporters like to make their country look bad,'" Bagdikian observed.

The lesson for journalists, he continued, is in realizing that they will never be loved by everyone and that going after the truth should take precedence over popularity.

Bagdikian contended that government secrecy has become excessive "because the country has drifted into an assumption that the key to national strength is secrecy. We almost never hear the other side of that coin: that too much secrecy can weaken the government."

The struggle for more openness, he said, involves both open meeting laws and the federal Freedom of Information Act, which is under government assault.

"The Reagan administration has argued that it costs too much to administer the Freedom of Information Act, about \$60 million a year," Bagdikian commented. "In budgets measured in trillions, that is not much to give the public its own information. It costs less money to maintain the act than the Pentagon spends each year for marching bands."